

5.6 Historic Preservation

This section of the report presents a summary of findings related to the preservation and adaptive reuse of the corridor's older, and potentially historically significant, structures. The summary is organized around the following:

- Preservation Strategies for Revitalization
- Local and National Designation
- Significance of Resources along H Street
- Preservation Incentives
- Heritage Development

Preservation and Community Revitalization

The H Street Corridor retains a distinctive collection of historic commercial buildings that reflect the history of the people that lived, worked, and shopped there. Historic preservation may be the best means for the District's residents and visitors to explore H Street's ongoing history and strengthen its sense of place. The H Street Corridor and the immediate areas that surround it can benefit from local and national historic designation of its eligible building stock. Potential benefits include federal and local tax credits for property owners who rehabilitate their historic properties, local regulation that would encourage the retention of the historic fabric of its buildings, and the development of local heritage tourism opportunities.

Numerous studies have underscored the important role that historic preservation plays in revitalizing older

neighborhoods and commercial centers throughout the U.S. It is often the quality and character of historic buildings and settings that attract initial reinvestment in economically blighted areas. Initial reinvestment often starts with a number of small-scale, residential, or small business projects that eventually spark the interest of larger investors.

In addition, preservation strategies provide the foundation for successful 'Main Street' revitalization efforts across the country. By focusing on historic preservation and retaining community character, the Main Street program—founded in 1980 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation—has been extremely successful, becoming one of the most powerful economic development tools in the nation. The Main Street program is designed to improve all aspects of the central business districts of U.S. towns and cities. Building on a downtown's inherent assets—rich architecture, personal service, and most of all, a sense of place—the Main Street approach strives to rekindle entrepreneurship, downtown cooperation, and civic concern.

In April 2002, the H Street corridor was selected by the ReStore DC selection committee as one of five new Main Street programs in the city. The program will continue for five years, and funding and professional support is being provided by the DC Economic Development Office and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. A board of directors, an executive director, and a series of committees will administer the program.

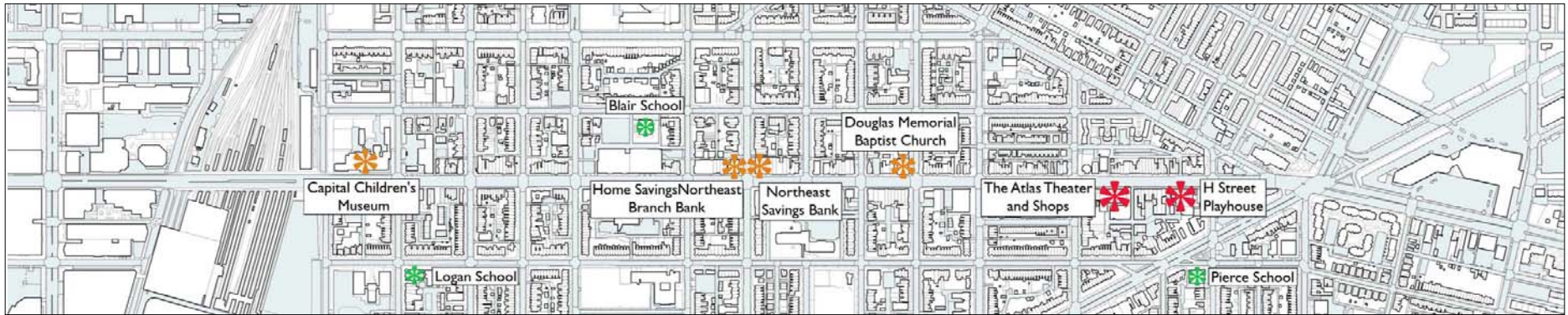
Designation of Historic Sites and Districts

In the District of Columbia, historic properties can be officially recognized by listing on the District of Columbia's Inventory of Historic Sites (a local designation) or by inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places (the federal government's listing of important historic properties). Often properties are listed both locally and nationally. District of Columbia and federal designations confer different protections, benefits, and constraints on the historic properties. An overview of each type of designation follows.

Local Designation

The District of Columbia's Inventory of Historic Sites is the city's official list of properties that have been determined worthy of protection due to their historical or cultural significance. The list was established in 1964 and now includes more than 500 individual sites and two dozen neighborhood historic districts that, together, contain more than 20,000 buildings. To be placed on the Inventory, properties or historic districts must be nominated and approved by the District's Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB).

Inclusion in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites recognizes the historic or cultural value of a property. Locally designated historic properties are eligible for special consideration under the D.C. Construction Code (Section



513) and for waivers of certain zoning requirements. In addition, local tax benefits are available to some designated historic sites. (See 'Historic Housing Tax Credit,' D.C. Code, Section 47-1806.08).

Buildings and sites that are either individually listed on the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites or located within a historic district are subject to the regulations that are explained in Title 10, Chapter 26 of the District of Columbia's Municipal Regulations. These regulations require that the District's HPRB review planned exterior alterations to listed properties. The goal of the HPRB is to preserve the historic fabric of designated buildings and sites in the city. The HPRB approves, defers, or denies applications for alterations by determining whether proposed changes will create significant negative impacts on the historic character of the properties within its purview.

National Designation

The National Register of Historic Places is the official federal list of historic districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture. The list is administered by the National Park Service (NPS) with the assistance of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in each state. In the District of Columbia, the SHPO is part of the Office of Planning (OP).

Individual sites and historic districts on the National Register of Historic Places are recognized as having historic

significance in local, state, or national history. National Register listing also confers a level of protection to historic sites by requiring that all federal and state agencies consider the impact of their planning and construction activities on properties that are listed or that are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Owners of income-producing properties that are listed on the National Register can apply for credits that equal 20% of the certified total rehabilitation costs paid to rehabilitate their property. These credits can be used to satisfy federal income tax obligations.

Listing on the National Register does not restrict the activities or rights of private property owners. Since land use regulation is traditionally carried out by local governments in accordance with state laws, the federal designation of a historic property does not regulate the actions of private property owners.

H Significance of Resources along H Street

Although there are no National Register listed historic properties on H Street, several properties are listed on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and a number of historic buildings along the corridor that could qualify as individual sites for both National Register and local designation. The vast majority of the buildings along H Street would not qualify for individual listing, however; as a group they form a historic corridor that could be listed as a historic district.

Local Designation. Two historic properties on H Street have recently been placed on the District of Columbia's Inventory of Historic Sites. They are:

- The Mott Motors/Plymouth Theater (currently H Street Playhouse)—D.C. Landmark Designation 4/25/2002. Built in 1928 and renovated for use as a movie theater in 1943, the Mott Motors and Plymouth Theater building is a 'rare survivor of the small-scale, inner-city automobile dealerships which served a vital but largely overlooked role in the transformation of the urban and exurban landscape and American way of life through the transportation revolution made possible by the automobile. The building is also a fairly intact example of a World War II-era theater which catered principally to African Americans, the first such facility in the Near Northeast neighborhood.' (D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board's Historic Landmark Designation Case No. 02-26 'Decision' dated April 25, 2002).
- The Atlas Theater and Shops—D.C. Landmark Designation 10/24/2002. Built in 1938 and designed by prominent theater architect John J. Zink in the Art Moderne style, the Atlas Theater and Shops building is a 'good example of the neighborhood movie house in Washington. It exemplifies the evolution of the motion picture theater type in Washington and served the local residents for thirty-eight years. It is associated with the city's heritage in social, historical, cultural, commercial, and developmental terms.' (HPRB 'Staff Report' dated March 23, 2000).

Historic Designations		
	<i>Local DC Designation</i>	<i>National Register Designation</i>
Who designates?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DC HPRB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DC HPRB recommends NPS makes final decision
What is the Purpose?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition Protection of Heritage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition.
What are the Benefits?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be eligible for local tax credits.* Design controls through review of changes by DC HPRB. Special consideration under the DC Construction Code. Waivers of certain zoning requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligible for 20% federal tax credits.** Consideration in federal & DC-funded project planning. Eligible for charitable contribution tax deduction for donation of a historic preservation easement.
What Constraints are there on Designated Properties?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exterior alterations require the approval of the DC HPRB. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No mandatory design controls; no restrictions on demolition, additions or alterations.***

Abbreviations: DC HPRB = D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board; NPS = National Park Service.

*See 'Historic Housing Tax Credit,' D.C. Code, Section 47-1806.08). As of November 2002, the District government had not included funding for this tax credit in its budget.

**The federal historic rehabilitation tax credit is only available to incoming producing properties such as apartment buildings, office buildings, restaurants or other commercial properties.

***Except when applying for the federal tax credits. This application process requires that the applicant follow the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation when designing alterations to the subject property. The standards are available online at <http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/standguide/index.htm>.

Potential Eligibility for National Register Listing. Based on their architecture and history, a number of buildings located on the H Street corridor may be eligible for listing on both the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places. Several buildings that warrant further study to determine their eligibility include:

- the Little Sisters of the Poor complex at 220 H Street (now the Capitol Children's Museum);
- the former Home Savings Northeast Branch Bank at 720-722 H Street (now a local branch of the Bank of America);
- the former Northeast Savings Bank at 800 H Street (now a local branch of Riggs Bank);
- the former Douglas Memorial Baptist Church at 1000 H Street, and
- the former Ourisman Chevrolet Dealership (established 1920, rebuilt 1951) at 624-626 H Street (now H Street Storage).

Potential for a Historic District. The corridor contains historically- and aesthetically-linked buildings that reflect the development of the area as a major transportation and commercial corridor from the end of the 19th century through the middle of the 20th century. The corridor retains a distinctive collection of historic commercial buildings that reflect the history of the people that lived, worked, and shopped there. Historic preservation may be the best means for the District's residents and visitors to explore H Street's ongoing history and to strengthen its sense of place. The H Street Corridor and the immediate areas that surround it can benefit from local and national historic designation of its eligible building stock. Potential benefits include federal and local tax credits for property owners who rehabilitate their historic properties, local regulation that would encourage the retention of the historic fabric of its buildings, and the development of heritage tourism opportunities.

Despite some large and out-of-character infill development along the H Street corridor, a preliminary, windshield survey of the historic physical fabric of H Street and a review of written histories and documentation indicates that the segment that extends from 4th Street NE on the west to

the intersection of Florida and Maryland Avenues, NE on the east contains a sufficient number of historic buildings to justify the exploration of a potential historic district in the area. The boundary for such a district would be drawn to exclude certain areas where infill development has compromised the historic character of the corridor:

In the case of H Street Corridor, the continuous physical fabric of the historic street facades has been degraded in several places along the corridor where, within the last two decades, older buildings have been replaced or removed. These include the blocks or portions of the following city blocks:

- the south side of H Street between 12th and 13th Streets (site of AutoZone);
- the south side between 10th and 11th Streets;
- the south side between 8th and 10th Streets (H Street Connection);
- the south side between 6th and 7th Streets (office building);
- the north and south sides between 3rd and 4th Streets; and
- on the south side between 2nd and 3rd Streets.

The process for establishing a designated historic district, either national or local, would require the physical documentation of each individual building or site within the potential district; the development of a series of historic contexts that are illustrated by the individual buildings and by the group of buildings as a whole; the detailed assessment of the district's level of integrity; and a determination of the areas of significance and period of significance for the district. To define a boundary for a potential historic district on the H Street corridor, further historical study and physical documentation of its buildings will be required.

Preservation Incentives

Owners of historic buildings and buildings contributing to the significance of a historic district are eligible for several incentive programs. Federal and state tax credit programs provide incentives for historic preservation through targeted tax credits for owners who rehabilitate historic properties.

For income-producing (commercial or rental) properties listed on the National Register individually, or as contributing properties within listed historic districts, property owners can apply for credits that equal 20% of the certified costs that they pay to rehabilitate their properties. These credits can be used to satisfy federal income tax obligations.

The federal government also offers a 10% tax credit to property owners who rehabilitate buildings constructed before 1936, regardless of whether they are officially designated as historic. The 10% federal tax credit applies to non-residential, commercial properties where a specified percentage of the existing structure is retained during the rehabilitation project. The 10% credit does not apply to buildings that are individually designated as historic or are located in designated National Register historic districts.

Several states offer historic preservation tax credits at the state level. The District of Columbia provides a 'Historic Housing Tax Credit' for owners of properties in certain local historic districts. The law provides income tax credits for up to 35% of the expense of rehabilitating historic houses. (See D.C. Code, Section 47-1806.08; Note: As of November 2002, the District government had not included funding for this tax credit in its budget.). Properties in the H Street Corridor can benefit from H Street's inclusion in the District's preservation incentives program.

Sample Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Project for a Designated Historic Building

Description	Monetary	
	Value	Notes
Acquisition Price	\$100,000	
Land Portion	\$20,000	
Building Portion	\$80,000	
Rehabilitation Expenditures	\$200,000	Generally, the cost of rehabilitation must exceed the value of the building portion.
Amount of Tax Credit	\$40,000	\$200,000 x 20%
Investor's Marginal Tax Rate	36%	
Annual Credit Allowable	\$9,000	\$25,000 x 36% Under passive loss exception of tax code

Adapted from the National Trust For Historic Preservation's Preservation Information Booklet: 'A Guide to Tax-Advantaged Rehabilitation,' by Jayne F. Boyle, Stuart Ginsburg and Sally Oldham, revised by Donovan D. Rypkema, 1994.

Heritage Development

Historic preservation maintains and enhances the historic character of a community and helps to create places that attract visitors who want to experience local history. Heritage tourism is a rapidly growing sector of the travel industry and is a proven economic development tool for historic areas.

Founded in 1996, the District of Columbia's Heritage Tourism Coalition utilizes the District's past to promote the

vibrant history of the Nation's Capitol and the city 'beyond the monuments.' The Coalition's members include nearly every museum and cultural organization in the District as well as neighborhood groups, community development corporations, faith-based organizations, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (METRO), and the National Capitol Region of the National Park Service.

The Coalition develops programs that encourage the growth of heritage tourism throughout the city. Most of its efforts focus on areas outside the city's major tourist destinations on the Mall. In collaboration with Metro, the Washington Convention Center, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Washington Historical Society, the Coalition has initiated a 'Beyond the Monuments' campaign to promote neighborhoods as tourist destinations.

In October 2001, the Near Northeast Citizens Association initiated a multi-year cultural study to develop an understanding of the specific historic contexts that apply to H Street. The first phase of the project was funded through a federal Historic Preservation Fund grant and resulted in a written narrative history of the neighborhood which is summarized in the brochure that can be viewed at <http://www.hstreetdc.com/cultstudy/nnebroch1.pdf>. Using the historical data collected through this research project, people who live and work along the H Street Corridor can capitalize on the DC Heritage Tourism Coalition's expertise and programs to promote itself as a travel destination.